

# ITALY

Italy's history, as the base of the Roman Empire, ended in 476 AD with the fall of the western half of the empire, but Rome became the capital of what became the Roman Catholic Church. The Church became the only organizational structure left that was, to some degree, able to preserve civilization and Christianity in the West. A corrupted Church lost the allegiance of most of Northern Europe (except Ireland) during the Reformation. Italy remained Catholic and still is in name only. Like most of Europe, Italy has become highly secular and very hardened to the Gospel. Many of the priests in the Catholic Church have turned to the occult, particularly in Turin. The fact that the Vatican Bank turned out to be the significant money-laundering funnel for the Italian Mafia, plus the sexual scandals of the church have further eroded the Italian confidence in "Christianity" as they understand it.

Jack Kreidler was born into a German family who had immigrated to New York. He broke away from a pampered boyhood, and after World War II, he was sent all over the world by Pan American Airlines, using his abilities as a technical advisor to set up airports. Along the way, he picked up the ability to forge documents and soon was involved with an international crime syndicate in drug smuggling. Being truly global and using his status with Pan Am, he became a useful tool for his crime bosses. He married an Italian socialite named Ana and settled down into a normal routine with her living in Rome. Ana did not know about Jack's life as a criminal. As Interpol was closing in on him, he finally confessed to his wife on a trip to New York and was even considering suicide. He then confessed to his mother, whom he had not seen in many years, in a reunion with her. She blurted out as he was leaving, "Why don't you trust God?" He cynically prayed to God afterward, saying, "OK, if you exist, show yourself!" God did just that. On October 2, 1954, Jack "stumbled" into a Word of Life rally in New York City and trusted Christ as his Savior. With help and counseling, it became apparent that God was calling him back to Italy as a missionary, not as a criminal. He was introduced to Open Air Campaigners by seeing and then participating in the open-air ministry with Jim Duffecy and Art Williams conducting meetings in Times Square. He eventually joined them as a volunteer and started his ministry based in Rome in 1969. During the 1970s, Jack worked with various groups in the Rome and Naples areas and was able to conduct major outreaches not only in Rome and Ostia (Rome's port) but in other cities as well. Some churches were planted as a result. Jack was never able to start a full-fledged OAC branch or build a team as he operated in the manner of an independent evangelist. In the early 1990s, he took on an international itinerant ministry, and the work in Italy became dormant. Jack was promoted to heaven in April 2008.



JACK KREIDLER



ANNI AND KORKY DAVEY

However, the work of OAC in Italy did not vanish. Korky Davey (OAC UK) took up the torch and was able to lead teams in Italy, training churches in evangelism, and conducting outreach. Later, Mark and Kathy Detzler (OAC UK) came to Milan in 1989. They ministered for over ten years before returning to their home base in Britain to be involved in a church-plant in Bristol but still maintained a great concern for the work in Italy.

Rob Davis (OAC Europe) also led teams to Italy in the early 2000s. These teams of OAC 'Europe Now' ministered in various areas in Northern Italy, based in Venice.



ROB AND TRACI DAVIS

Michela Piccolo was trained in the UK and, along with her husband Giancarlo, returned to Milan in 1998 and established the OAC ministry there. There is a weakness in the evangelical churches in Italy in that they are small, divided, and often don't get along with each other. Michela, who is very skilled in mime, clown ministry, gospel-illustration, puppets, and using the sketchboard, has been well suited to teach churches how to reach out to their communities.

That has been made easier since the Catholic Church ceased to be the state religion in 1984, creating an atmosphere with great freedom of religion. However, religious education in schools is strictly limited to the teaching of Catholicism. Michela and Giancarlo, as they train and equip these churches, are helping to create solid confidence and the ability to witness effectively for Christ in their neighborhoods. Several young people receiving this training are now grown up leaders in their local churches. Some are even going into full-time ministry, which demonstrates how OAC has proven to be a useful tool in Italian church growth.

Michela's ministry goal is to encourage and equip the church to do effective evangelism in their own area. Through the years, there have been individuals coming to Italy to conduct ministry on their own instead of working in conjunction with the local church. This often gave people within many local churches the impression that outreach needed to be done by the "professionals" which too many times led local Christians to think they weren't good enough to do this ministry. That's why OAC in Italy built up a training program to help the church to be prepared well enough so they could be bold and effective in preaching the Good News on the streets using creative tools such as the sketchboard, mime, clowning, object lessons, and puppets. Through the years, OAC in Italy has been able to equip several teams who were then able to bring the Good News out to the streets, in prisons, parks, hospitals, homes for the elderly, and so on. One of the specific goals of this training is to encourage teenagers to be involved in evangelism and be active in the church. This has produced excellent results as some of these young people, now grown up, are evangelism leaders in their local churches. Some of them have dedicated their lives to God, going into full-time ministry.

OAC in Italy now is working on a project which aims to produce multimedia evangelistic material for today's generation and thus continue to 'Present Christ by all Means Everywhere.'



MICHELA PICCOLO AND THE MIME TEAM